

Organizing a Cleanup



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A healthy river or stream has many components. Cleaning up a stream or riverbank is essential work to help restore both beauty and life to flowing water. A successful cleanup needs enthusiasm as well as careful organization.

This manual provides a series of steps to follow when organizing a stream and riverbank cleanup.



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This manual was originally developed by Hoosier Riverwatch staff with information from the Izaak Walton League of America's Save Our Steams (SOS) Program. It has been revised and updated as part of an ongoing project encouraging implementation of more cleanup efforts on rivers and streams. Special thanks to Jeff Muse, Sarah Hippensteel, Lyn Hartman, Mandy Burk, Jeremy Schnyder and Kevin Hardie. Additional materials and design for this edition were made possible with the help of Friends of the White River.



Introduction

Indiana's rivers and streams are important natural resources to every Hoosier, no matter where they may live, work or play.

Whether we walk along their banks, float or motor upon them in a watercraft, wade their pools and riffles, or simply catch a glimpse of them as we drive over a bridge, our rivers and streams help define the landscape and our quality of life.

Some of them are in need of help. As a call to action, the Indiana Department of Natural Resources created Hoosier Riverwatch, a program devoted to ringing the bell for grassroots stewardship of Indiana rivers and streams.

Hoosier Riverwatch has two components:

- volunteer water quality monitoring (see page 16 for more information), and
- the Adopt-A-River program.

The fundamental goal of Adopt-A-River is to encourage local community groups to adopt waterways, much like groups adopt highways in the Adopt-A-Highway effort. With the aid of the Adopt-A-River program, these groups volunteer to help keep riverbanks clean, educate their communities, and become stewards to protect and enhance the water quality of Indiana's rivers and streams.

This manual is designed to help those who are starting or expanding a cleanup better plan and coordinate their time and efforts. If you want to beautify a local river but do not want to be a part of the Adopt-A-River program, this manual can still provide helpful information towards having a successful cleanup. If you do decide to apply to become part of Adopt-A-River, be sure and review the requirements and forms, beginning on page 15.



Getting Started

Organizing Overview

Who is interested in cleaning up a river?

It could be the local chapter of the American Legion, girl or boy scout troops, a business or a group of concerned citizens in your town.

Practically anyone can participate in a riverbank cleanup. Invite interested groups or individuals to an “awareness” meeting to discuss the need to clean up a local river or stream. You may want to keep the group small, depending on the size of cleanup you wish to do. Civic leaders, government personnel, and media representatives should be invited to actively participate.

The awareness meeting should explain the concept of a riverbank cleanup, why the cleanup is needed, and how it benefits water quality and recreation. Have a map of the area and its rivers and streams for the attendees. Consider inviting local anglers, residents, or water company officials to speak. Someone who has participated in a successful cleanup elsewhere could speak to the group.

A river or stream runs through nearly every person’s life in some way. We need to ask ourselves if we are willing to take care of it.

Be enthusiastic and sincere about the need for a cleanup.

Keep the meeting short. Encourage participation from the group. Have someone record all ideas and decisions. Offer any historical, ecological, or economic information about the local watershed. Emphasize the power of local efforts to produce change. Offer examples of community success with river cleanups elsewhere in Indiana or other states.

Write Your Objectives

- What will be done
- Who will do it
- Specific results you want to achieve

Select a Site

- Consider size
- Consider the time required
- Decide on a date or time of year: spring, summer or fall

Choose a Theme

Create a Backup Plan



Cleanup Organizing Checklist

8-10 Weeks Ahead

- ☐ Form a small organizing committee
- ☐ Choose a stream which needs cleaning up
- ☐ Determine who owns land around the waterway
- ☐ Obtain permission for cleanup from managing agency or landowner
- ☐ Complete the DNR Adopt-A-River application, if you want to be in the program on an ongoing basis and commit to ongoing cleanups
- ☐ Map your site
 - walk, float or boat the stream section
 - note size, type, and amount of litter
 - decide whether trash can be hauled out by foot or if it requires large equipment
 - identify safe access points
- ☐ Set date (and rain date) and time for cleanup

6-8 Weeks Ahead

- ☐ Recruit volunteers for cleanup
- ☐ Select zone captains
- ☐ Choose a meeting place
- ☐ Choose a trash collection site
- ☐ Decide on needed equipment and supplies
- ☐ Solicit donations (and ask volunteers what they can bring)
- ☐ Check on haulers and recycling options
- ☐ Check on landfills (location, hours, cost, and items accepted)
- ☐ Request sponsorship of local government agencies, especially your solid waste management district

2-5 Weeks Ahead

- ☐ Create news releases and send to newspapers, radio and TV stations in your area
- ☐ Distribute any brochures, flyers, posters or door hangers you've developed



1-2 Weeks Ahead

- ☐ Confirm details with volunteers; send a map showing cleanup site
- ☐ Provide phone number with message in case of rain event or high water
- ☐ Confirm details with haulers, landfills, and recycling centers
- ☐ Follow up with calls on news releases
- ☐ Take pictures of area before you start
- ☐ Draft your emergency plan (*always* include phone numbers)

- ☐ Check weather report
- ☐ Call and remind media
- ☐ Assemble and double-check supplies and equipment
 - sign-in sheets, name tags, liability waivers, first-aid kit
 - trash bags, trucks and special equipment, rakes, hoes, shovels, gloves
 - boats and life jackets (if needed)
 - hazardous materials collection tools (tongs, containers, etc.)
 - clean water and soap, handi-wipes, or hand sanitizer for cleaning hands



Day of Cleanup

- ☐ Have volunteers sign in, make name tags, and read and sign waivers
- ☐ Hold a brief orientation and explain what they are expected to do
- ☐ Give safety talk
- ☐ Assign volunteers to zone captains
- ☐ Pick up trash
- ☐ Make sure all trash ends up at collection site
- ☐ Sort recyclables to recycling center and load and dispose of trash
- ☐ Take pictures of volunteers at work and of the newly-cleaned river
- ☐ Thank volunteers and donors for a job well done
- ☐ Celebrate (serve refreshments and thank or recognize volunteers)



The Week After

- ☐ Send thank you notes to sponsors and contributors
- ☐ Complete cleanup summary and fill out and send in cleanup activity report (if participating in Adopt-A-River)
- ☐ Have a committee meeting date and time for next cleanup
- ☐ Assemble and organize appropriate documentation, photos and media coverage for future use

Adapted from Oregon's Adopt-A-River Program



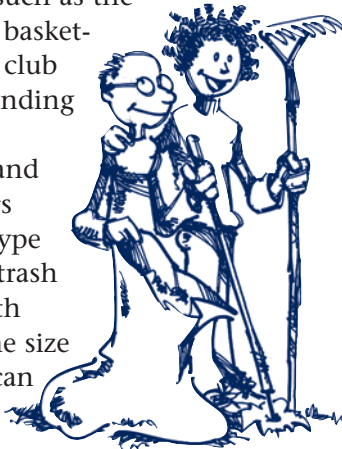
Site Selection & Planning

If you do not already know the river site you want to clean up, consider the following:

How big do you want the project to be?

For example, an ambitious senior citizens group in a town is interested in cleaning up a large spot on their local creek, but does not have the resources to remove heavy debris from steep banks. Volunteers that are elderly could pick up litter along less rugged shorelines. Another group, such as the high school girls' and boys' basketball team or environmental club could tackle the more demanding part of the site.

Consider the strengths and weaknesses of the volunteers when choosing a site. The type of equipment needed (e.g., trash bags, chain saws, tractor with chain) will also influence the size of cleanup project a group can undertake, as well as who is involved with what tasks.

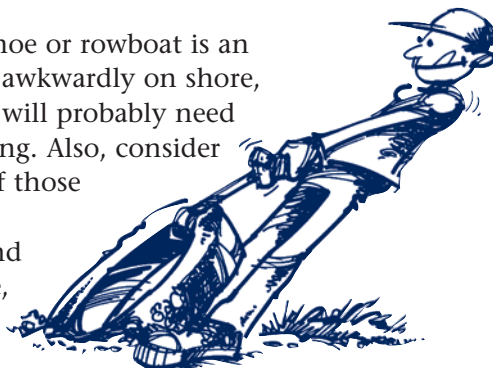


How much time will the cleanup take to complete?

Many communities along Indiana rivers and streams will appreciate the cleanup efforts of volunteers. Some sites may require more time and effort than others. How much time is the group willing to commit? First time groups may be more receptive to one-day cleanups. Most successful cleanups are accomplished in one day or less, but can then become ongoing seasonal efforts.

Do you want to work from the river or on the shore?

Floating down the river in a canoe or rowboat is an ideal way to reach litter caught awkwardly on shore, but cleanups with major debris will probably need road access and trucks for hauling. Also, consider the safety and the experience of those participating as well as water conditions. Combining bank and watercraft efforts, when feasible, can result in removing the largest variety of trash.



How do you prioritize the cleanup area?

Planning is essential. Well before the day of the project, take inventory of the area, noting the worst, most visible sites. Talk to the people who live there; community residents generally want to see activity at the most noticeable sites. Ask residents and outdoor clubs or recreational users with a knowledge of the river or stream to help you prioritize segments of the site.

Begin your cleanup day at the sites needing the most work. Consider safety and the time it will take to clean various sites. Remember to determine access points.

Who owns the site?

When considering a site, determine if it runs through a farmer's acreage, a local corporation's property, or local public domain. Finding out may take a few phone calls, one being to the county auditor, recorder, or an office dealing with land titles.

If the land is publicly-owned, approval for cleanup is relatively easy to acquire. Contact the agency that owns or manages the property and explain your interest. Most likely, they will approve and may even offer assistance in some way.

Approaching a landowner requires tact. Righteously saying, "Hey, litterbug, we'd like to clean your section of the river," is sure to hurt your chances of obtaining access approval. The current landowner may not be responsible for the trash. Maybe it was an illegal dumping or something from upstream.

Explain that your group would simply like to beautify the river and would like permission to do so. If they agree, have them sign the Consent for Access to Property form on page 19. Keep this for your records.



Recruiting Partners

A cleanup project can be as small as one child removing a candy wrapper from a backyard streambank...not much publicity necessary, few tools and only a moment's dedication.

Other projects might involve a few dozen citizens collecting litter along the local streambank, or several hundred pulling out everything from refrigerators to cars as in the annual Ohio River Sweep.

The number of volunteers needed for a project depends on the size of the cleanup you would like to do. If you need more people than your own organization can provide, think about contacting some others:

Schools

If you are in a college town and need more volunteers, try contacting university sororities or fraternities. School groups are often looking for volunteer opportunities in the surrounding community. Seek out high school groups as well: athletic teams; environmental clubs; FFA and others.

Civic Groups

Contact the American Legion, the local senior citizen center, service groups, the Boys' and Girls' Clubs, conservation groups...pick up a phonebook or search the Internet and look up clubs! The Girl Scouts and Boy Scouts always look for volunteer and leadership opportunities as part of their programs.



Local Agencies

Local park departments, Soil and Water Conservation Districts, the county Purdue Cooperative Extension Service, and Solid Waste Management Districts may provide technical or organizational assistance to help you plan your event.

Advertise

Place an article or an ad in the local newspaper, place flyers around town, or use the door hanger on page 20. Remember to plan far enough in advance to allow for response time, especially if you are using your website or the media.

Above all:

- Provide clear information about dates, location, and what volunteers are expected to do and bring with them.
- It may be crucial that you have something to offer volunteers for their efforts: refreshments, T-shirts, certificates, prizes, etc. Emphasize this when recruiting volunteers!
- Provide telephone numbers, e-mail addresses and a website that interested individuals can contact for more information.



Doing the Work

Safety Considerations

As an organizer of a cleanup, you must be very concerned about the safety of those who will be participating.

Part of site preparation is checking the site for potentially-dangerous conditions. If you see any of the following problems, contact the appropriate agency to assist you:

Hazardous Materials

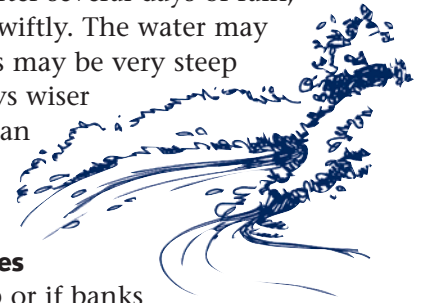
If there are barrels, containers of chemicals or other items that you think might be hazardous or polluting, contact the Indiana Department of Environmental Management Office of Environmental Response Hot Line at 800-451-6027.

Water Quality

Additional potential dangers include poor water quality due to bacteria, especially for sewage overflows, or other pollution. Therefore, consideration of contact issues, including use of gloves, is a must!

Fast Flowing Water

Safety also involves understanding the dangers of working near water. After several days of rain, rivers may flow very swiftly. The water may be deep and the banks may be very steep and slippery. It's always wiser to cancel a cleanup than risk the safety of volunteers.



Steep or Unstable Sites

If the site is very steep or if banks appear to be unstable, contact your local Planning or Zoning Administrator or your county Soil and Water Conservation District for advice on the safety of the site.

Water, especially rivers, deserves a great deal of respect. Emphasize safety! Life preservers are required by law when boating. A volunteer with first aid and water safety training should be present during your local cleanup day. Also, contact your local DNR conservation officer. Make sure everyone participating in the cleanup has signed a liability waiver similar to the one on page 18.



Trash Disposal

Little good would be done if a group pulled trash out of the water only to pile it on the riverbank. Something must be done with the debris.

Always ensure safe disposal of material collected in the cleanup by making arrangements well in advance of the event. Metal items, especially those made of steel, can sometimes be recycled if prior arrangements are made, and if they are separated from items that are to be disposed of and otherwise handled properly.

Nonrecyclables might be taken at no cost to a landfill if you make arrangements in advance and explain that you are working voluntarily. Otherwise, seek a sponsor to cover the fee.

Waste tires and batteries must be properly handled and taken to a recycling facility or appropriate handling facility. For waste tires, contact a waste tire disposal facility to process your tires and a waste tire transporter to deliver them if possible.

Lead-acid (car) batteries can be given to any seller of these batteries because they are required to accept used ones by state law, but it's best to make arrangements first. Retailers that accept used auto batteries will then make sure the batteries are properly handled and recycled.

Get help

As a rule, you should contact your Solid Waste Management District to find out how to dispose of the different materials you will collect from the river. They may be able to help sponsor the event, source dumpsters, or serve as a contact for haulers and recycler.

They are also an initial contact for items to target for recycling and how these items should be handled.

For additional information, you may also wish to contact the Indiana Department of Environmental Management, Office of Pollution Prevention and Technical Assistance at (317) 232-8172.

Someone will have to haul the material you collect to the appropriate disposal facility. If no private haulers are willing to donate their services, try city, county or township agencies or departments. They might offer equipment for hauling. Also, you will need to provide bags and/or other separate containers to volunteers for collecting trash and recyclable items.



Tools & Equipment

Okay, your volunteers arrive on cleanup day... you go over safety information, then hand each person a trash bag and point to the river. "Go, clean, and have fun."

Is that enough to get things started? Not likely. Before the project begins, consider what support materials are often needed to carry out an effective cleanup:

Trash bags or other containers

Consider using reusable containers such as five gallon plastic buckets; they are durable and easy to handle, especially if you drill holes in the bottom to let water drain away. Otherwise, heavy-duty trash bags are fine.

Tools

Gloves, rakes, shovels, and pokers for litter are useful. You may also need wheelbarrows, chains, rope, etc.

Heavy equipment

Will you need a backhoe to remove large trash items, such as car parts, refrigerators, etc.? Consider dump trucks for hauling as well. Remember that skilled operators will be needed to handle the equipment.

Sanitary facilities

Some cleanup sites may need portable toilets delivered. Otherwise, public facilities such as those in parks are fine; just notify management about your project so that the facility is available and adequately stocked. Be sure to have hand sanitizer available and make sure people use it.

Refreshments

Especially in hot weather, drinking water or other beverages must be available. Food may be a good idea during a break or as a picnic after the cleanup. Refreshments make a project much more festive. Seek out restaurants, grocery stores, and other local businesses for donations of food and drinks.

Safety Support

Inform local police, paramedics, and conservation

officers of your cleanup project, especially if it will be near a busy road. Also have volunteers sign liability release forms before working.

Recognition

Offering prizes, T-shirt, caps, or certificates is a great way to recognize volunteers and those who donate to the cause.

Support

With a little effort, you may be able to get some or all of the support materials you need donated. For instance, a local livery may be willing to donate the use of canoes for the cleanup. By emphasizing the publicity local donors will receive (for example, by printing logos on a volunteer t-shirt) your chances of acquiring help are greatly improved.

You will need to plan much in advance for support material, so create a committee to begin the work as soon as possible.

What should volunteers wear?

- ☐ High-top work boots with non-skid soles (no tennis shoes, sandals or open-toed shoes)
- ☐ Long pants, long sleeve shirt
- ☐ Hat or cap
- ☐ Heavy duty work gloves
- ☐ Sunscreen
- ☐ Insect repellent



What should volunteers bring?

- ☐ Trash poker or BBQ style tongs
- ☐ Emergency phone numbers
- ☐ Medical information
- ☐ Liability release form (signed by parent or guardian if under 18)
- ☐ Drinking water

Pointers for volunteers

- ☐ Know what poison ivy looks like
- ☐ Work in groups of three or more
- ☐ Have a first aid kit available
- ☐ Avoid large drums or suspicious containers

